

Rotherham MBC

Inclusion Strategy 2026-30

Foreword

The Council Plan for 2025-2030 restates the importance of Rotherham being an inclusive borough where all are welcome and people are treated fairly. After the disorder at Manvers in the summer of 2024, it's crucial that we emphasise these values and focus on bringing communities together, countering divisive narratives and ensuring that people feel safe and listened to.

No one in our town should feel that they are excluded, disadvantaged or held back due to their race, gender, disability, or any other characteristic. Rotherham must be a place where everyone can achieve their aspirations and live as happily and healthily as possible.

The Inclusion Strategy sets out how we will continue to work towards this.

We have made good strides in recent years. Our own assessments and, importantly, external reviews from other councils have confirmed that we are making progress. There is more to do, though, to embed this consistently. We need to ensure that equality considerations inform all our decisions, that inclusive practice is reflected throughout our policies, processes and activities, that – where appropriate - services are reshaped based on community feedback or produced with communities, and that, critically, we can show how outcomes are improving for different groups.

Our focus on an inclusive economy is central to the overall approach. This means that we are committed to tackling economic disadvantage and health inequalities, recognising that these issues are deep-seated but that addressing them is vital to creating a fair and inclusive society.

Practical examples of this range from the Employment Solutions service, which provides tailored support to help people into work or training, to our social value commitments, where we are maximising the benefits for local people and places from every pound we spend. This is one of many areas where we are working closely with partner organisations, combining our efforts, learning from each other, and multiplying our impact.

When we talked to local people as part of developing this strategy, the importance of communication came up constantly. Not just communicating regularly but doing it well – using methods that are appropriate and accessible, and showing that we're listening to and acting on the things people tell us. This will be another cornerstone of our approach to inclusion.

Underpinning all of this is our firm commitment to the Public Sector Equality Duty and protected characteristics. We have established staff networks based on the protected characteristics and strive to be an employer of choice that is representative of the communities we serve.

In Rotherham, we're also conscious of supporting other groups that are disadvantaged or at risk of exclusion. This includes people in care, refugees and migrants, those with caring responsibilities, people who are unemployed or on low incomes, ex-offenders, victims of domestic violence, homeless people, and veterans and their families. We facilitate and contribute to various initiatives, groups and partnership boards, enabling us to work with diverse communities, organisations and people to increase engagement with services and improve outcomes.

Ultimately, we know that inclusion is a continuous journey. Our commitment is to keep listening, keep learning and keep improving as we seek to create a place that everyone is proud to call home.

Vision and purpose

Our overall vision for Rotherham, set out in the Council Plan for 2025-2030, emphasises the importance we place on inclusivity and equality. It stresses that 'We value decency and dignity and seek to build a town where opportunity is extended to everyone, where people can grow, flourish and prosper, and where no one is left behind.'

This is underpinned by our values: caring, honest and proud - celebrating Rotherham, communicating openly, knowing our communities and residents, and taking time to listen and understand what matters.

To work purposefully and effectively towards these aspirations, we need to ensure that the services we deliver are informed by a clear understanding of the people in our communities, shaped by meaningful interaction with them, including those whose voices aren't always heard, and accessible to everyone.

The Inclusion Strategy describes how we will achieve this in the context of our obligations under the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty.

There are several ways in which we ensure that the strategy is embedded across the Council. We require that all actions in our annual delivery plans for the Council Plan consider equality, diversity and inclusion issues; that the same considerations apply to individual services' plans for the year; and that all Cabinet and Council decisions are informed by equality screenings and, where the screenings determine it's necessary, more detailed equality analyses.

Taken together, this provides confidence that an explicit consideration of how people may be excluded or disadvantaged runs through everything we do.

Maintaining a strong focus on inclusion has never been more important.

In a time where divisive narratives, misinformation, and polarising debates can undermine trust and social cohesion, it is vital that public institutions lead by example. We remain committed to fostering a culture of respect, understanding, and shared belonging—where every resident feels seen, heard, and valued.

This strategy reaffirms our ambition to make Rotherham a place where diversity is celebrated, and where people from all backgrounds can thrive. We recognise that inclusion is essential to building resilient communities, improving outcomes, and ensuring fairness.

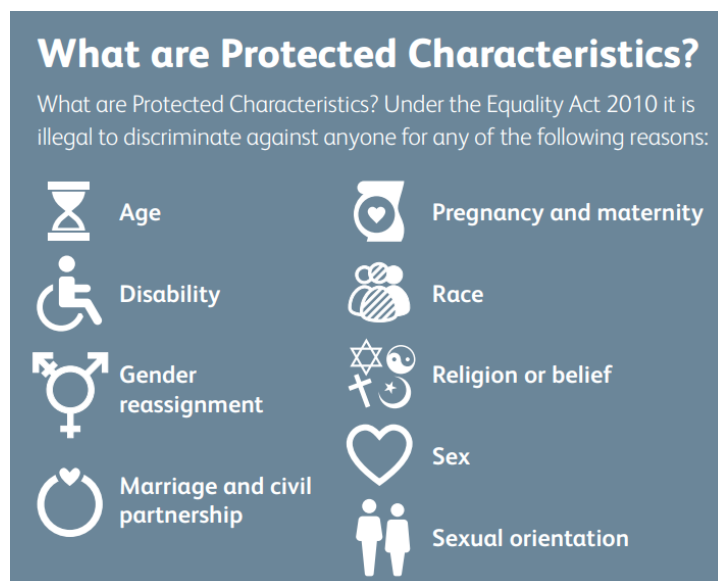
By embedding inclusion into our policies, services, and workforce practices, we aim to remove barriers to opportunity. We will continue to listen to our residents, learn from lived experience, and act on what we hear—ensuring that our decisions reflect both our legal duties and the realities of those we serve.

Policy Context

Rotherham Council's approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion is shaped by national legislation, statutory duties, and best practice frameworks.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires us to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.



Under the Equality Act, there are four main types of discrimination:

- **Direct discrimination**

This form of discrimination is when someone is treated differently or worse than someone else because of that person's protected characteristic.

- **Indirect discrimination**

This form of discrimination occurs when a company put a general rule or plan in place, which puts some people with protected characteristics at a disadvantage. In the workplace, this general rule is only discriminatory when there's no justification for implementing it.

- **Harassment**

This form of discrimination is where someone conveys negative behaviour towards someone else to harm that person's dignity. Typical forms of harassment include bullying, harmful nicknames, asking inappropriate questions and gossiping.

- **Victimisation**

This form of discrimination is when someone becomes a victim of harmful behaviour because they support (or are expected to support) someone who possesses a protected characteristic. To be a victim of victimisation, you don't need to have a protected characteristic yourself.

There is also legal provision covering **positive discrimination**. This is a form of discrimination that favours someone by treating them differently in a positive way. An example is an organisation appointing someone from an underrepresented group into a role without considering whether they have the right skills for the post over other candidates who are better qualified. Positive discrimination is unlawful.

The **British Sign Language (BSL) Act 2022** requires local authorities to recognise BSL as a language of England, Scotland, and Wales, promote its use in public services and communications, and ensure deaf BSL users can access information and engage with services in an inclusive and equitable way.

From March to June 2025, the government consulted on mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting to help shape proposals in the forthcoming **Equality (Race and Disability) Bill**. The findings are yet to be published. The government is also expected to enact the **Equality Act's socio-economic duty**. This would require public authorities to consider how their decisions might help to reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage.

We draw on the **Equality Framework for Local Government**, which provides a structured approach to assessing progress and improving equality outcomes. The framework's principles – such as strong leadership, meaningful community engagement, and a focus on measurable improvements – underpin this strategy.

Demographics

Rotherham is one of four metropolitan boroughs in South Yorkshire. Our 25 Council wards cover a wide range of urban, suburban, and rural areas. The borough has a population of 276,595 (2024), mostly living in the urban areas of Rotherham.

- Age
 - Rotherham's population is ageing: 1 in 5 residents are aged 65 and over, representing 19.7% of the total population.
 - Rotherham has a below average percentage of people aged 18 to 29, (13.2% compared to 15% nationally) a result of young people choosing to study and work elsewhere.
 - In 2024, 19% of the population in Rotherham was aged 0 to 15, compared to 18.4% in England and 18.4% in Yorkshire & The Humber.

- Race/ethnicity
 - The borough has an increasingly diverse community. The Census 2021 found that 88.3% of the population are White British and 11.7% are from minority ethnic groups.
 - The Pakistani community is the second largest ethnic group in Rotherham after White British, with almost a third of Rotherham's 31,193 ethnic minority residents from Pakistani backgrounds (10,001 residents).

High level ethnic group	Percent
White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	88.3
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	5.3
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	1.1
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	1.4
White other	2.8
Other ethnic group	1.1

- Over half of the borough's ethnic minority population live in Rotherham's three central wards.
 - In Rotherham schools, 24% of pupils have an ethnic minority background (2024-25) whereas only 3% of pensioners (65+) are from ethnic minority backgrounds (Census 2021).
- Gender
 - Rotherham's population is 49.2% male and 50.8% female, compared to 49% male and 51% female in England (2024)
 - In 2025, full-time female workers in Rotherham earned only 75% of full-time male workers. The GB average for full-time female workers is 87% of male full-time earnings.
- Disability
 - 56,177 people in Rotherham (21.1% of the population) have a long-term health condition, whilst 9.8% report severe limitations (7.5% nationally).
- Sexuality/gender reassignment
 - 2.1% of residents in Rotherham identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual according to census data.

- The census also reveals 0.6% of Rotherham residents aged over 16 identify as transgender, non-binary or have a gender identity different from their sex registered at birth, compared to 0.5% nationally.
- Religion
 - 49% Christian, 5.1% Muslim, 39.8% no religion (Census 2021)
- Deprivation
 - The borough is amongst the 15% most deprived local authority districts in England. 11,904 children are living in “absolute poverty” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2022-23).
 - Life expectancy in the most deprived areas of Rotherham is 9.9 years lower for men and 9.5 years lower for women than in the least deprived.
 - Healthy life expectancy at birth in Rotherham for males is 56 years and for females is 55.6 years (Public Health England public health profiles 2021-23) compared to 61.5 years for males and 61.9 years for females in England.

Key achievements

- **Outstanding services for children and young people**

The Council's Children and Young People's Services were rated as outstanding in an Ofsted report published in December 2025. Rotherham is one of only nine councils in England to hold this rating alongside the top area outcome for the local partnership's arrangements for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Ofsted highlighted that children's voices are central to assessment, planning and support, with lived experience actively shaping services. This includes initiatives such as the Children in Care Council, 'In Care Voice' group, and 'Look Ahead' for care leavers.

- **Embedded Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Adult Social Care**

Planned and delivered a comprehensive training programme: 15 one-day EDI courses (April 2024–June 2025), two service events attended by over 100 staff (November 2024), and a planned cultural competence programme (May 2025–June 2026) comprising 15 practitioner sessions and four tailored sessions for 59 elected members.

- **RASCAL – Commitment to co-production, inclusion and continuous improvement**

The newly established RASCAL (Rotherham Adult Social Care Always Listening) group brings together individuals with lived experience of adult social care to shape future services. Meeting monthly, the board ensures feedback is embedded into decision-making and service design. Supported by the Council, it uses accessible formats such as BSL interpretation to promote inclusive engagement and continuous improvement.

- **Tenant engagement framework**

The development of our new tenant engagement framework has been a genuinely collaborative process. Tenants and other key stakeholders have been involved throughout, including our group of 26 regularly involved tenants. Through a series of co-design workshops, tenants, key staff, the Cabinet Member for Housing and a representative from tenant engagement experts, Tpas, helped to define what brilliant tenant engagement looks like and created draft outcomes. The feedback was supplemented by responses to a survey completed by over 100 tenants. This engagement process is central to our target of achieving Tpas exemplar accreditation, a mark of excellence that sets the bar for the highest standards of tenant engagement.

- **Community Recovery Fund**

Following the August 2024 disorder in Manvers, Rotherham secured £600,000 through the Community Recovery Fund to support long-term community cohesion. The funding enabled grassroots initiatives, youth engagement programmes, and education-based interventions, all shaped by local organisations and residents. This rapid, inclusive response helped rebuild trust and promote unity across affected communities.

- **Baby Packs**

Since March 2025, we have been delivering new baby packs to pregnant women across the borough, as part of a £360,000 family-friendly investment to give every child the best start in life. Packs include clothing, a toy, a book, and other essentials for the first six months. On average, there are 2,740 babies born each year who live in Rotherham, and all are eligible to receive a pack.

- **Crisis Support**

We have provided crisis support funded through a combination of the government's Household Support Fund grant and Council funding. Working with the voluntary sector, we ensured that this funding reached our most vulnerable households. We have also provided food vouchers to help ensure that children had enough to eat during school holidays, an energy scheme to help with fuel bills, and specific financial support for our care leavers.

- **Rothercare**

Rothercare is Rotherham's in-house assistive technology service, supporting over 5,600 households to live independently. A revised delivery model has modernised the service, expanded digital connectivity, and improved customer choice. Consultation showed 88% of users want the service to continue, with many citing reassurance and safety as key benefits. Rothercare plays a vital role in preventative care and inclusive service delivery.

- **Cultural Events – Holocaust Memorial Day, International Women’s Day, Reclaim the Night, WOW (Women of the World)**

The Council supported a wide range of cultural events in 2024-25 that celebrated diversity and inclusion. This included Holocaust Memorial Day, which brought together faith leaders, schools, and residents, and the 10th annual Reclaim the Night march, part of the WOW Festival, which featured creative workshops and public calls for safe, inclusive spaces.

- **Inclusion-Focused Strategies**

We have developed and are implementing a range of strategies to promote independence, inclusion, and safety. This includes the [Learning Disability Strategy](#), [SEND Strategy](#) and [All Age Autism Strategy](#), which were co-produced with service users. Other key strategies, such as the [Digital Inclusion Strategy](#), and [Safer Rotherham Partnership Strategy](#), involved extensive consultation and elements of co-design.

- **New Council Values**

Launched in April 2024, following engagement with staff across the organisation, the Council’s refreshed values—*Caring, Honest, Proud*—reflect a commitment to inclusive, transparent, and ambitious public service. These values guide how the Council works with communities, makes decisions, and delivers services that celebrate Rotherham and support its people.

- **Independent Travel Training**

A tailored programme for young people (aged 14+) with additional needs designed to build confidence and life skills through supported use of public transport. Delivered in partnership with families and schools, each young person is matched with a travel trainer to develop a personalised plan that promotes independence, self-esteem, and access to education, employment, and leisure.

- **Social Value Policy 2024–2027**

This sets out how supplier contracts must actively support local employment, apprenticeships, and training—especially for disadvantaged groups—turning procurement into a tool for inclusive growth and opportunity in Rotherham.

Our new strategy will build on these significant achievements. This means taking further steps to consistently deliver inclusive, responsive services. It also means working closely with all our communities to develop strategies and initiatives that reflect their experiences, recognise their strengths, and meet their needs.

Approach and themes

The strategy is shaped by the responses we received from local people and groups during the consultation exercise. It is also informed by the equality, diversity and

inclusion informal peer review carried out by City of Doncaster Council (CDC) in 2024/25.

Consultation

From August to November 2025, several focus group sessions took place with local community and advocacy groups and their service users. The aim was to ensure that all protected characteristic groups were represented. An online survey was also available, enabling all residents to have their say on inclusion issues.

What we heard is that people...

- Don't always feel listened to:
 - it can be difficult to communicate with the Council and accessibility barriers can vary for different groups
 - the Council doesn't always appear to act on feedback, explain what action has been taken, or maintain a dialogue with groups
- Sometimes feel unsafe:
 - this can be particularly pronounced for some communities
 - there is a view that more deprived places are overlooked
- Want to be part of the solution:
 - co-production—designing services together—is crucial
 - regular engagement mechanisms would help, particularly for those who feel excluded or ignored

A separate report is available with more details of the consultation process and findings.

Informal peer review

CDC's informal peer review team visited the Council for three days in December 2024, speaking to staff, senior leaders, and a small number of tenants. Following the visit, additional information was provided and further virtual meetings took place.

The review report set out the Council's strengths and areas of good practice, whilst also highlighting areas for development. The findings were aligned to the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) and are incorporated in the themes and actions outlined below.

Themes

Guided by the consultation feedback and informal peer review, our strategy focuses on:

1. Working together
2. Responsive services
3. Welcoming places

In addition, it is important for the Council to demonstrate that it values inclusivity and diversity in its workforce. To reflect this, we have added a fourth theme:

4. An employer of choice

For each theme, we have outlined the current position and areas of focus for improvement. Underneath this, we have included the relevant EFLG 'excellent' criteria and the broad actions that will be taken. This will form the basis of our approach to monitoring progress.

1. Working together

What we do already and how we'll strengthen it

We have a strong history of working with our residents and communities and strive to create services and plans designed with and for the people using them. For example, RASCAL (Rotherham Adult Social Care Always Listening) co-production group was set up in 2024 to enable people who use RMBC adult social care services to influence service changes and plans. Meeting monthly, the group has helped to shape the adult social care website and produced an e-bulletin.

Our tenant engagement team have a particular role in ensuring that the voice of our residents is heard and that tenants can shape services to meet their needs. This includes tenant panels and events, regular estate walkabouts, and the 'screen team', which reviews and improves the way we communicate with tenants.

The consultation feedback clearly showed that people are eager to engage with the Council and welcome the opportunity to collaborate to develop solutions and improve services to ensure they are inclusive and accessible. One way to achieve this is by utilising our strong relationships with voluntary and community sector organisations, who often act as a gateway to the groups they support. Elected councillors also play a crucial role as community leaders: engaging, listening to and working with constituents, and championing inclusion.

In Children and Young People Services (CYPS), voice and co-production mechanisms are well-established. Based on the Four Cornerstones principles (*welcome and care, value and include, communicate, and work in partnership*), several forums exist that give young people and their families the opportunity to shape and influence services. This includes the voice of young people in care, care-experienced adults, and young people and their families accessing SEND provision.

We continue to build our understanding of communities and places within the borough and the issues that affect them. The Rotherham data hub, for example, brings together a wealth of data and intelligence on health needs and the factors that affect health, helping us to target efforts to reduce health inequalities. As noted in the informal peer review report, cross-departmental efforts to share data are helping

services better understand overlapping needs, particularly in areas such as health inequalities and social care.

Despite the good practice highlighted above, the informal peer review report suggested that consultation and engagement efforts are fragmented, with concerns about repetitively consulting the same communities. It also identified that more effective sharing of data with partners could improve our understanding of intersectionality.

This demonstrates that more needs to be done to consistently and effectively engage groups and communities that are less likely to work with the council, ensuring their voice is heard and services reflect their needs and concerns.

What excellent looks like

- Services are co-produced with service users wherever possible and service users can influence changes
- Formal and informal interactions take place between the organisation and its diverse and under-represented communities
- All under-represented groups are actively participating in and influencing decision making and intersectionality is explored and accounted for
- Key decision makers are involved in the engagement process
- There is evidence of partnership arrangements for engagement leading to improved outcomes in participation. Partners are open to challenge and constructive criticism and there is openness in considering the views of different groups and stakeholders without bias towards the loudest voice(s)
- The Council's leaders' maintain a high profile on community relations, making use of members' links with different communities depending on circumstances
- Participation of under-represented groups has improved and people across a range of protected characteristics are able to influence decisions
- There is evidence of service improvements driven by greater participation from under-represented groups

Key actions

- Identify opportunities to develop and maintain a dialogue with diverse and under-represented communities
- Roll out the use of new consultation software to make our approach more consistent and improve accessibility
- Embed a more consistent approach to co-production based on an agreed framework or approach
- Work with partners to share information and good practice on inclusion issues

2. Responsive services

What we do already and how we'll strengthen it

The Council delivers a wide range of services that directly support those who may face barriers to inclusion. This ranges from services for those with special educational needs and disabilities, to targeted employment support initiatives, school holiday food provision for children from lower income families, and support for domestic abuse victims.

Part of our approach to ongoing service improvements is to gather feedback from customers, recognising that this provides valuable insight into how we're performing.

We realise, though, that we must do more to show how the feedback we receive is changing the way we do things. As people emphasised during the consultation, listening without acting or without communicating what we're doing in response, only causes frustration and a loss of trust.

Crucially, we must also ensure that we don't only listen to those who find it easy to make their voice heard. This means doing more to ensure there are easy ways for all our customers and residents to get in touch, raise concerns, and highlight how we could do things better.

The informal peer review highlighted that senior officers are committed to improving customer experience and there are good examples of how we make our services accessible and adapt communications to reach diverse communities. Our website has been externally validated as one of the more accessible local authority sites – most of it can be navigated using speech recognition software and listened to using a screen reader. For in-person contact we can offer an interpretation service for customers whose first language isn't English.

However, the review found that this needs to be more consistent across services, with further evidence that service delivery is being shaped or redesigned based on engagement or consultation. We also need to track outcomes for different groups, demonstrating whether changes are improving access and reducing specific barriers.

The use of equality analyses to understand how service changes might risk excluding or having a detrimental impact on particular groups is central to our decision-making process.

This is working well, as acknowledged in the peer report, but we will go further in improving the links between inclusion objectives and service plans and ensuring that services report on their performance from an inclusion perspective.

Another critical aspect highlighted in the consultation is the importance of community facilities and delivering services locally. There are several examples of this approach, including our family hubs and the Open Arms Rotherham financial inclusion project. Both initiatives take a one-stop-shop approach, using a range of local venues across the borough and working closely with our voluntary and community sector partners.

What excellent looks like

- Services are accessible and offer different access routes to meet the varying needs of different communities
- There is evidence of how levels of customer satisfaction with services and associated outcomes have improved over time
- There are examples of how different customers' experiences are analysed and acted upon to improve services
- There is a clear link between meeting inclusion objectives and delivering positive outcomes for communities, and we can show that improvements are being delivered
- Service and business plans are designed and written with inclusion objectives in mind
- Gaps have been identified in terms of who may not be using services and why. Action has been taken to change services in response
- There is evidence of improving outcomes, disaggregated where appropriate to demonstrate the effects on different communities/protected groups

Key actions

- Develop the staff training offer to improve understanding of inclusion issues and customers' varying needs
- Strengthen equality impact assessments by reviewing the forms, updating guidance and providing appropriate training
- Review the way in which inclusion issues are considered within service plans, including commissioned services
- Systematically use data and intelligence to ensure services are inclusive and to understand whether outcomes are improving for different groups
- Make proactive, practical changes to communication methods and platforms, including the Council's main website and galaxy sites, to ensure they are accessible to all communities
- Deliver a wide range of core and targeted services that meet community needs

3. Welcoming Places

What we do already and how we'll strengthen it

We want all towns, villages and public spaces in Rotherham to be welcoming places for everyone where people always feel safe. This is an important aspect of being an inclusive and diverse town.

Based on the consultation feedback, we know that there are people in our communities who do not always feel safe in certain areas of Rotherham, at different times of the day, or just being themselves.

We understand that a welcoming place is made up of more than the physical environment. It includes the services that we and other organisations deliver and the diverse people that make up our communities. It is also about a way of working –

building relationships, bringing people together, and using the assets that exist across our neighbourhoods, including residents' skills and knowledge, to jointly solve problems and plan improvements.

Our commitment to improving services in line with local people's priorities is the basis for our ward plans, which are shaped and delivered with residents, community groups and partner organisations.

Cultural and creative activities can also play a major role in helping people to feel included and valued. Our unique Children's Capital of Culture programme explicitly aimed to celebrate Rotherham's diversity and remove barriers to accessing culture. Many of the young people who participated identified as LGBTQ+, disabled or neurodivergent.

We will use this strategy to influence other plans, activities and services, making sure groups feel both included and safe in Rotherham. This includes working with colleagues and partner organisations involved in Rotherham's community safety partnership, which has a specific focus on creating safer neighbourhoods.

The partnership has overseen a significant programme of activity on hate crime, increasing the number of reporting centres and working extensively with local schools to raise awareness, including creating a professional development package.

More broadly, we will ensure that the needs and safety of all residents are considered in planning and designing changes to our borough. This includes working towards more of what people have consistently told us is important to them: well-kept parks and green spaces, more connected communities, peaceful and quiet areas with less anti-social behaviour, cleaner streets and safe roads, good local amenities, and revitalised town and village centres.

What excellent looks like

- There is evidence of improved safeguarding outcomes for under-represented groups
- Service design and delivery is producing equality outcomes for all under-represented groups in the community
- The Council takes a sophisticated approach to fostering good relations, resulting in measurable improvements in relationships between diverse communities
- The organisation works with others to improve performance on good relations between diverse communities
- The Council plays a leading role in bringing partners and the community together if there are serious incidents of hate crime

Key actions

- Deliver a range of events and activities across Rotherham that help to bring people together
- Focus on the use of education and engagement to prevent hate crime
- Consult on, produce and deliver ward plans, working closely with local groups and residents
- Oversee ongoing community cohesion initiatives working with local voluntary and community groups
- Improve local places, making them more accessible and appealing and utilising key assets

4. Employer of choice

What we do already and how we'll strengthen it

The Council is one of the borough's largest employers, with nearly six thousand full-time equivalent employees. We are committed to fostering an inclusive workplace where everyone feels valued, respected, and able to thrive.

It is also important that our workforce reflects the diversity of Rotherham's communities. One of the ways we have done this is through targeted recruitment and engagement with schools, the voluntary sector, and community groups. These efforts will continue, alongside new initiatives to attract and retain talent from underrepresented backgrounds, so our workforce truly represents the borough.

As a Disability Confident employer, we continue to develop our recruitment approach to attract and retain talent from all backgrounds. Our aim is to ensure recruitment processes are inclusive, accessible, and insight driven. By embedding inclusive principles and strengthening support for hiring managers, we seek to remove barriers and create fairer opportunities for all applicants.

We offer flexible working arrangements, development opportunities, and a broad range of benefits to support work-life balance. Inclusion is embedded in our workforce development, with apprenticeships and internships helping young people gain meaningful experience and build career pathways. Meeting apprenticeship targets remains a priority, particularly in supporting young people from underrepresented backgrounds, including care leavers.

CYPS are currently creating two positions for people from communities who are currently less represented in the workforce. These will be entry level posts with a clear career path. At the same time, Council staff will be taking advantage of a national initiative providing leadership training for people of colour.

Staff networks play a vital role in championing diversity, providing safe spaces for employees to connect, share experiences, and influence change. We will strengthen these networks by expanding participation and developing a framework that enables greater organisational impact.

We are committed to fostering a workplace culture that supports wellbeing, and inclusion. This approach reflects our values—listening and working together, being open and accountable, and striving for the best for our people and place.

We will continue to build a sense of belonging by encouraging wider staff participation in events and initiatives that celebrate diversity. We want all employees to have a voice in shaping what we do, ensuring decisions are informed by experience and local insight.

What excellent looks like

- The workforce profile, including major commissioned service providers, broadly reflects the diversity of the local community and labour market
- Equality outcomes for the whole workforce are clearly prioritised and demonstrably achieved
- Staff involved in equality networks are satisfied that they are listened to and that they can make a difference in the organisation
- Workforce strategy and management practices are informed by robust, comprehensive employment data, with benchmarking and sharing of good practice embedded
- We consistently consider equality in decision making, resource allocation and service design
- Services are provided by well-trained staff who understand and meet the diverse needs of local communities
- The organisation actively supports career progression for under-represented groups, fostering a culture of opportunity and fairness
- A positive health and wellbeing culture is embedded across all levels, promoting identity, self-esteem, and psychological safety for all employees

Key actions

- Expand participation in staff networks and offer flexible ways to get involved
- Ensure that workforce data can be disaggregated to enable analysis by protected characteristic, supporting workforce planning
- Ensure the learning and development offer supports the progression of under-represented groups across the Council
- Embed inclusive principles into recruitment and selection by reviewing processes to ensure they are fair and accessible, and using feedback to identify barriers and improve practice
- Ensure the refreshed Workforce Strategy emphasises inclusivity, with specific actions identified
- Explicitly link inclusion to wellbeing by embedding it in the workplace wellbeing programme and related initiatives
- Increase staff involvement in diversity events to strengthen engagement and celebrate inclusion across the organisation

Measuring progress

Progress will be monitored via an annual action plan setting out key activity across the strategy's four themes. This will be subject to regular oversight and reporting via robust internal governance arrangements. The relevant EFLG criteria will also be used to gauge progress.

Each year, an annual report will provide an overview of progress, highlighting key achievements and case studies.

In addition, both the Council Plan and annual plans for individual Council services will clearly set out how inclusion, equality and diversity issues are being considered and addressed in the planning and delivery of priority activity.

We will also ensure that our internal staff networks and external groups representing or advocating for those with protected characteristics are given the opportunity to hold us to account.